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ABSTRACT

Based on Benjamin Franklin's "Poor Richard's Almanac," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that Ben Franklin is known, among other things, for his wit and wisdom; that Franklin published an almanac for 25 years; and he scattered aphorisms throughout the almanac. The main activity in the lesson is for students to paraphrase one of Franklin's aphorisms and to create a modern proverb with the same meaning. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN: Ben Franklin

LENGTH OF LESSON: One class period

GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

SUBJECT AREA: U.S. History

CREDIT: Summer Productions, Inc.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. Ben Franklin is known, among other things, for his wit and wisdom.

2. Franklin published an almanac annually for 25 years.

3. He scattered proverbs (or aphorisms), short sayings that spoke the truth, throughout the almanac.

PROCEDURE:

1. Provide a brief biographical sketch of Ben Franklin:

- Born in Boston in 1706
- Self-educated
- As a teenager, studied printing in his brother's newspaper shop
- Independent, he went off on his own to Philadelphia
- Became a printer and a civic leader
- After retirement (at 42), invented the lightning rod, bifocal lenses; discovered electricity
- Worked extensively in public affairs
- Died in 1790

2. Explain that above and beyond all the achievements just listed, Franklin was also a writer. He was known, among other writings, for his annual almanac, into which he sprinkled proverbs, or aphorisms—some of which Franklin had heard and then modified, others of which he created.

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3. Distribute to students a list of some or all of the following proverbs by Franklin from *Poor Richard's Almanack*: To err is human, to repent divine; to persist devilish.

- At the working man's house hunger looks in, but dares not enter.
- There are no ugly loves, nor handsome prisons.
- Love your Neighbor; yet don't pull down your Hedge.
- No gains without pains.
- Beware of little Expenses: a small Leak will sink a great ship.
- Fish and Visitors stink after three days.
- God helps them that help themselves.
- What you would seem to be, be really.
- For want of a Nail the Shoe is lost; for want of a Shoe the Horse is lost; for want of a Horse the Rider is lost.
- He that falls in love with himself will have no rivals.
- Dost thou love Life? Then do not squander Time; for that's the Stuff Life is made of.
- The Cat in Gloves catches no Mice.
- You may be too cunning for One, but not for All.
- Keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee.

4. Direct students to select a proverb from the list and write a paraphrase of it, making sure that a reader will have no doubt about what Franklin meant. As a second step, students should create a modern proverb that has the same meaning as the one they picked by Franklin.

5. Students should hand in their paraphrases and original proverbs to you, but in addition each student should write his or her original proverb on another sheet of paper. Students sitting next to each other should exchange papers with original proverbs. Each student should then try to figure out which Franklin proverb the original proverb relates to.

ADAPTATIONS:

Now that the United States is a multicultural society, build on the Franklin proverbs activity by asking students to share proverbs in languages other than English. Do any other languages have proverbs that carry the meanings Franklin was after? What other concerns or subjects surface in proverbs from other cultures?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Explain how Benjamin Franklin was "the quintessential American" of his time. Who would you call the quintessential American of our time? Why?

2. How did Franklin shape the Enlightenment in America? Discuss his use of reason to explain things and conduct his life.

3. Was Franklin a traitor to England? Were his actions in support of the colonies justifiable? Debate your answers.

4. Defend or criticize Franklin's response to his son William's leadership in the loyalist movement.

5. Compare and contrast Franklin's views and actions regarding slavery with those of other colonial leaders such as Washington and Jefferson.

6. Discuss what Franklin's epitaph should be.

EVALUATION:

You can evaluate students' work using the following three-point rubric:

- **Three points:** full and clear paraphrase; original proverb, which matches sense of Franklin's, with striking imagery; no errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

- **Two points:** adequate paraphrase; original proverb, which comes close to sense of Franklin's; some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

- **One point:** inadequate paraphrase; original proverb only partially related in meaning to Franklin's; many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

EXTENSION:

Franklin's Autobiography
Invite students to read sections of Franklin's *Autobiography* that paint a picture of Franklin as a young man—that is, when he was in his teens. Ask students to write two paragraphs in response—one on how generating an autobiography can help a person understand himself or herself better in general; one specifically on what Franklin the adult writer seems to have learned about himself as a young man.

What's in a Name?
Ask students to use the Yellow Pages from a city or region or to do a Web search, looking in either case for contemporary businesses or other organizations that use the name *Franklin* or *Ben Franklin.* Pose the following questions to students: "Why would a modern business or other organization name itself after an 18th-century figure? What characteristics do these businesses or organizations want to suggest to consumers or the public?"

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Benjamin Franklin
by Chris Looby, Chelsea House, 1990.
Biography that covers Franklin's many talents and accomplishments.

Franklin of Philadelphia
by Esmond Wright, Harvard University Press, 1988.
A biography that presents Franklin as an old Englishman and a reluctant revolutionary.

WEB LINKS:

Benjamin Franklin: Glimpses of The Man
You must visit this online exhibit at The Franklin Institute Science Museum. It includes an outstanding timeline, links to Franklin's writings, classroom enrichment activities and even experiments that would make a nice science or social studies lesson.
http://www.fi.edu/franklin/rotten.html

The American Revolution - an HTML project
This hyper-linked site will give you and your students an excellent timeline for a better understanding of the events in Benjamin Franklin's life.
http://grid.let.rug.nl/~welling/usa/franklin.html

VOCABULARY:

apprentice
One bound by legal agreement to the work of another for a specific amount of time in return for instruction in a trade, act or business.
Context:
Franklin was once an apprentice to his brother in the printing trade.

indentured
A contract binding a person into the service of another for a specified period of time.
Context:
Apprenticeship was indentured labor and at seventeen Benjamin was already too independent for that.

proverb
A short saying expressing a well-known truth of fact.
Context:
Its huge success was mainly due to the witty proverbs that Franklin wrote or gathered and re-wrote.

Loyalist
Colonists in America who remained loyal to Great Britain.
Context:
Franklin became reluctantly, but then vociferously, the leader of the revolution and his son William, the leader of the Loyalists.

diplomat
One appointed to represent their government in its relations with other governments.
Context:
On December 3, 1776, America's first diplomat arrived in France.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 6-8

Subject Area: United States History

Standard: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.

Benchmarks: Understands United States relationships with European countries and their contributions to the outcome of the Revolution (e.g., Ben Franklin's negotiations with the French, consequences of the Treaty of Paris, relations with Holland and Spain).

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: United States History

Standard: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.

Benchmarks: Understands the social, political, and religious aspects of the American Revolution (e.g., opponents and defenders of England's new imperial policy; decisions leading to crisis of revolution; efforts by Parliament and colonies to prevent revolution; ideas of different religions; economic and social differences of Loyalists, Patriots, and neutrals).

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
This lively video biography of Ben Franklin reveals a man who made his living as a printer, but who made history as a writer, civic leader, scientist, inventor, statesman, diplomat and philosopher.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ▶

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:

Rediscovering America: The Real Ben Franklin

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What were the three important American documents that Benjamin Franklin signed?

2. What two electrical terms did Franklin create?

3. Why did the British Government fire Benjamin Franklin from the position of Postmaster General?

4. Why was William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's son, arrested and imprisoned by the rebelling colonists?

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Rediscovering America: The Real Ben Franklin

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What were the three important American documents that Benjamin Franklin signed?
Benjamin Franklin signed the Declaration of Independence, The Treaty of Paris and the Constitution of the United States.

2. What two electrical terms did Franklin create?
He created the terms of "positive" and "negative."

3. Why did the British Government fire Benjamin Franklin from the position of Postmaster General?
Benjamin Franklin was fired because he leaked letters from the Governor of Massachusetts to the public. The letters called for limiting the rights of colonists in America.

4. Why was William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's son, arrested and imprisoned by the rebelling colonists?
He was imprisoned because he was a Loyalist leader.

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